

It's Only Dark in the Nighttime by IrisVioletta

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Summary:

After the gate is closed, Steve struggles with insomnia. Unable to sit still, he takes to driving the streets, with the radio playing late-night tunes and a cigarette hanging from his mouth. He doesn't mean to a first, but he finds himself checking on certain houses: the Hendersons', the Sinclairs', the Wheelers', Max's and yes, even the Byers'. He needs to know that they're safe, that no creatures are crawling in the night. And for a while everything is all right. Until it isn't.

It's Only Dark in the Nighttime

The red light is back. The little colon between the 2 and the 0 on his clock incessantly blinking, taunting Steve. As if he doesn't know that yes, it's past 2 in the morning and yes, he's still awake. It's been like this most nights since he helped save the town, since an asshole beat his face in, since he exchanged his girlfriend for a gaggle of nerds.

Two weeks. He just wants to sleep.

But he's distracted by the restless wiggling of his toes and the itch in his fingers, so he gives in and goes for a drive.

He has no destination in mind, but shouldn't be surprised when he finds himself on Maple Street. And then passing Dustin's house. And even making his way down Cherry.

He's just making sure they're all right. That their parents' cars are in the drive and the shades are drawn and the lights are out. That they're hopefully wrapped up in their beds, fast asleep.

It makes him feel just a little better.

Sleep still won't come, so Steve spends most nights on his midnight rounds. His heart would race in bed, but here he's soothed by the steady motion of the car. The late-night DJs keep him company and the soft streetlights are calming. Not to mention the nicotine coursing through him. And yeah, maybe he should worry about that one someday but right now he's just worried about tonight.

He feels useful for once. He likes it this way.

Steve begins to notice certain things, like how the Wheelers' yard is perfectly tidy, the leaves always raked and the snow shoveled. The Henderson house is the opposite: the Halloween decorations are up until Thanksgiving and Dustin's bike is always left in the middle of the yard. He's witnessed a certain redhead climbing into one of the Sinclairs' windows, but keeps quiet. The nights he spots her are often

the same ones that he sees the blue Camaro in her driveway. Whatever makes her feel safe.

He even goes out to the Byers' house most times, usually turning his lights off so he doesn't wake them. He'd drive to Hopper's cabin if he knew how to get there.

He doesn't even try to be quiet when he finally returns home and collapses into bed. There's usually no one around to hear anyway.

The long nights are starting to weigh on him and he knows that it's showing. Even his winning smile can't distract from the bags under his eyes or the fact that his hair is messier than ever.

But his parents barely see him and his teachers have never cared much for him and his baseball coach just shrugs when he decides not to play this season. Maybe he wasn't so good after all.

The worst is the day that Nancy corners him outside school, in the little walkway that he's always thought of as *theirs*, for better or worse.

"Are you okay?" The concern in her eyes is unbearable.

"Yeah, Nance. I'm fine."

"Steve..." She raises an eyebrow, so perfectly *Nancy* of her.

"Are any of us okay?" He shrugs, letting out a humorless laugh.

She keeps staring at him but backs down. "You're right. I'm here, y'know. If you need anything."

"Don't worry about it."

And he ignores the tightening in his chest as she walks away. He may be pushing her away, but it's for the best. She deserves to be with Jonathan. She deserves to be happy. He wasn't able to do that. But the night patrols...yeah he can do that.

The problem is that after cutting things off with Tommy H. and Carol and the like, Nancy was really his only friend left. Besides some shithead kids who seem too young to understand him but have already seen too much.

He's lonely. But it's easier to be alone in the car at night than to be alone in a crowded hallway.

A few months pass before the first "incident," as he takes to calling it. A misty night, on the edge of the woods, when he spots a light in the distance. Red and blinking slowly, like a lighthouse in the fog.

He pulls over to the side of the road and sticks his head out the window. "Hello? Anyone there?"

No answer comes and he feels a prickle of fear cross his neck. The whole thing seems too eerie to be just a lantern or flashlight. Something is wrong here.

But it's probably just his imagination. He just needs to sleep.

Only two days pass until the second incident. He's driving back on Mirkwood after having checked on the Byers's house (dark and still, as it should be), when his headlights catch on something in the middle of the road. Something...floating? Steve slows to a stop only a few yards away and his heart freezes. *It's a body*. As he opens the door, he looks up to the sky, half expecting to see a UFO. But there's nothing. Not even the moon or stars.

The forest seems unnaturally silent and he gets that same feeling along the back of his neck, but he makes himself walk up to the body. It's a girl, unconscious (or worse), in a simple t-shirt and jeans, sandy hair floating around her like she's underwater. He's reaching out a trembling hand when she begins to fade. His fingers only just catch her elbow before she disappears. He feels nothing, only air.

A ghost?

He's interrupted from his thoughts by a strangled noise and barely jumps out of the way as a deer sprints into the road. It trips over its

own hooves and collapses in a heap in the ditch.

What the hell is going on?

This might be more than his imagination.

Steve makes the mistake of mentioning the second incident to Dustin, who immediately decides that the Party needs to step in and assist. No amount of arguing can change the boy's mind and honestly, Steve is just too damn tired to.

That Friday night he parks down the block from the Hendersons' house and watches as the not-so-stealthy group of young teens approaches the car. He rolls his eyes. *This is gonna be real fun.*

With the exception of Will (who worries about sneaking out on his mom), the entire Party shows up, with backpacks of supplies and makeshift weapons.

Is Mike holding a slide rule?

Dustin opens the passenger door and Steve raises his hand, pointing to the backseat.

"Nuh-uh, El rides shotgun. Get in the back."

"What?" The boy pouts.

"She's our best fighter."

Dustin groans but does as he's told. As Eleven slips into the front seat, Steve adds, "Plus, I don't need you sitting on your boyfriend's lap."

Mike sputters and his red face is visible even in the dim light. "Yeah, well, what about Max and Lucas?"

Steve flicks his eyes up to the rearview mirror and finds the redhead sitting chastely next to Lucas. "Max, is your dad the chief of police?"

"Nope," she replies, making sure to add a pop at the end.

“Well there you go. Sorry, Wheeler.”

Truthfully, Steve wants Eleven up front because she’s the calmest of the bunch and he’s feeling a little unsettled about bringing the kids with him tonight. But he can never pass up a chance to tease Mike. El has always been a little clairvoyant and knows that Steve means well. Plus, she always likes being included.

Barely any time passes before he starts regretting bringing them along. For one thing, they won’t shut up. By the time they reach the forest, they’ve had him run through the story three times.

“Okay, let’s go over this again. Where did you see the body?”

“Mirkwood, it’s all been happening on Mirkwood.”

“He told us that already, dipshit.”

“Shut up!”

“I swear to God if you little shits don’t shut up, I’m leaving you out here.”

“Okay, okay.”

“He means it.”

“Wow El, just take his side, I see how it is.”

“The power of shotgun’s gone right to her head.”

“Shut up!”

“Goddamn it’s foggy out here.”

“Watch out!”

Steve slams on the brakes and everyone braces themselves. When they look up there’s a girl standing on the edge of the road.

Steve gulps. “Holy shit. That’s her.”

Everyone scrambles out of the car and the girl backs away, trying to

get out of the light.

“Hey wait!” Lucas calls. She stops, letting the unruly group approach her.

“Do you need help?” Mike asks. She simply furrows her brow and wraps her arms around herself, still wearing the same t-shirt and jeans.

“You look cold.” Dustin shrugs off his jacket and offers it to her. It’s a little snug, but it seems to do the trick. She fingers the buttons and looks around with guarded eyes. Steve wonders if this is the way Eleven was when she first appeared.

“Hey,” he murmurs, afraid of startling her. “What’s your name?”

She locks eyes with him and her voice is a low whisper. “Robin.”

As the first rays of sunlight appear, Steve sits on the couch in the Byers’ living room. There’s a flurry of activity - the kids arguing with Hopper, Jonathan frying eggs, Joyce pacing. Robin sits curled up in the recliner and El stays close to her, wrapping her in a heavy quilt.

Nancy hands him a mug of coffee, and he gives her a half-smile in return.

“I told you to talk to me.”

“Yeah, well...” He trails off. He doesn’t even know what to say anymore, the danger of their impending situation starting to weigh on his chest. It’s all happening again.

“I’m glad you were out there. I mean it. Thank you.” The look in her eyes is sincere and Steve thinks maybe, maybe someday they could be friends again.

As she gets up to root around for weapons, Hopper walks over and hands him the spiked bat.

“You know, kid...could use someone like you on the force. Think

about it.”

“Yeah, maybe I will.”

He’ll think about it. They just have to make it through this first.

Author's Note:

trying to get back into this writing thing